SWITCH-REFERENCE IN KIOWA DISCOURSE

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Over roughly the last two decades since William Jacobsen's (1967) groundbreaking paper on switch-reference in American Indian languages, theoretical interest in this topic has grown. Descriptions and analyses of switch-reference systems have appeared for languages of Australia, New Guinea, South America, and the Caucasus, as well as the native North American languages where it first gained attention. Switch-reference in Kiowa, a native American language spoken in the southern Plains, is a topic I have wrestled with before (Watkins 1976, 1978). Once again, interesting and hitherto unnoticed facts demand explanation.

To characterize switch-reference very generally, it is a device by which two clauses are linked and identified as having the same or different subjects. For example, the sentence **John$_i$ came and he$_i$ brought us gifts** would be a case of identical subjects, but **John$_i$ came and I invited him$_i$ in** would be marked as having different subjects. In their introductory essay to Switch Reference and Universal Grammar (1983), editors Haiman and Munro distill from data on a variety of languages with switch-reference what they consider to be the canonical switch-reference system. Such a system includes a pair of verbal suffixes indicating the coreferentiality of the subjects of a pair of clauses. The clause marked by the **same** or **different** suffix is taken to be the subordinate clause. In fact, many of the languages reported on in the volume are not examples of the canonical system and exhibit such features as switch-reference occurring on coordinate clauses, switch-reference particles as clause-final rather than verb-final, and even switch-reference markers that introduce clauses. In several languages, the switch-reference suffixes have also undergone semantic or functional shifts. One claim remains central, however: it is the **subject** of a clause that is judged to be coreferential with some other subject. In Haiman and Munro's words (1983:xi): "Characterization of the notion 'subject' is strictly syntactic, rather than semantic or pragmatic in most cases: it is not the agent or the topic whose identity is being traced."

At first glance Kiowa appears to be a nearly canonical switch-reference language, with symmetrical pairs of **same** and **different** clause-final particles. However, as I have argued before, and will summarize here briefly, it is virtually impossible to identify a subject in a Kiowa clause by any of the usual morphosyntactic tests. 'Subject' is not a very useful notion in Kiowa. Instead, the highest ranking semantic roles are judged for coreferentiality. Moreover, a closer look at connected discourse, including narratives and reported conversations, reveals an interesting phenomenon. The participant-tracking resources of switch-reference may be put to work coding some kind of continuity but not necessarily that of participants. Specifically, I hope to show that the **different** marker of the semantically neutral pair of switch-reference particles in Kiowa serves to indicate explicitly that the utterance or conversational turn it introduces bears some connection to the immediately preceding utterance **and** that the speaker chooses to signal his or her thinking about the

connectedness of the contribution. The nature of that connection is unspecified and left to the interpretation of the addressee according to general conversational implicature.

First, a brief look at the clause structure of Kiowa and the question of subjects. The Kiowa clause is verb-final, but not strictly so. The neutral order of arguments is AGENT PATIENT OBJECT, but in narratives various elements including adverbials and both patient and object roles can be dislocated to the right when they are given or already established information. Agreement prefixes code the semantic role of arguments in a complex system that formally marks agent in some prefixes, patient in others. There is no case-marking on full nouns, and there are no syntactic operations such as passivization that might be sensitive to grammatical relations like subject and object. The selection of participants to be judged for coreferentiality can be accounted for by a semantic role hierarchy now familiar in studies of topic accessibility (Givon, 1979). That is, the participant filling the highest ranking semantic role, AGENT > PATIENT > OBJECT, is the one matched with a similar participant in the following clause.

The three pairs of switch-reference markers (1) are normally clause-final particles (or sometimes suffixes). We will be focussing our attention on the neutral pair, gɔ and nɔ, but the preceding general comments about switch-reference apply to all three pairs.

(1)

	'when/while'	'yet'	'and'
SAME	cę:	k'ɔt	gɔ
DIFF	ę:	ɔt	nɔ

The sentences in (2) illustrate the simplest case of switch-reference: in (2a) gɔ indicates that the sole participants in the two clauses are coreferential; a second person dual actor ("you two") occurs with the intransitive verbs "get down or off" and "come in". In (2b), Sendey, the Kiowa trickster, has just sat down, happens to glance around, and along comes Coyote. The non-coreferentiality of the two actors is indicated by nɔ. It is worth noting that the prefixes in this example are formally identical, as are the prefixes in (2a), but the participants in (2b) are clearly identified as different.

(2) a. ma-sô: gɔ ma-hé:be

(**2duA**-descend/IMP **same 2duA**-enter/IMP)

'Get off (you two) and come in!'

b. hɔ́ndɔ́ Ø-tǫ́-hêl nɔ ɔ́:-dê: mɔ:thǫcǫ́:hį: Ø-ą́:-hêl

(why/indef **3sgA**-glance-hsy **diff** there-along/presentative Coyote **3sgA**-come-hsy)

'for some reason Sendey glanced around and there came Coyote'

That a semantic role hierarchy underlies judgments of coreferentiality is illustrated in (3). Like the examples in (2) the verb agreement prefixes are formally identical; they explicitly code a third singular patient with an inverse object and an implied or potential second or third person agent. In terms of actual participants, the agent of the first clause (the woman) is matched for coreferentiality with the patient of the second clause(her son-in-law). Even though the patients of the two clauses are coreferential (the son-in-law), it is the agent of the first clause that is matched for sameness of reference.

(3) ma:yį́ ... á-dom-de hɔ́ndé-a:-dɔ ɔ́-thâl-ǫ:mɔ-hel nɔ ɔ́-ámdé-hel

(woman ... her-son.in.law some-board-inv (2,**3sgA**):invO:3sgP-drill-make-hsy **diff** (2,3sgA):invO:**3sgP**-finish-hsy)

'a woman had her son-in-law drill some board and he got finished with it'

The examples to this point have yielded English translations that reflect the typical subject coreferentiality of canonical switch-reference: mother-in-law gets son-in-law to do something and/DIFF son-in-law gets it finished. Sentence (4), however, underscores the importance of a role-based analysis in explaining what gets judged for sameness. Although the first clause seems to be about the metaphorical gun (the inverse object), the participant matched for coreferentiality in the first clause is formally the patient, a cover term in Kiowa grammar for a range of non-agentive roles. The first person patient, possessor of the gun, ranks higher than the third person inverse object. This seems to suggest that the first person possessor is the topic, but it is not yet clear how a topic is identified in Kiowa discourse independent of such a hierarchy.

(4) nɔ́-tǫ́:-pál-k'í:gyay gɔ hegɔ́ hɔ́n a-tǫ́:-gɔ:

((2,3sgA):invO:**1sgP**-speak-weapon-get.stuck/PERF **same** then neg **1sgA**-speak-neg)

'My speaking gun misfired (got stuck) so I didn't say anything.'

Let us turn now to the unusual distribution of switchreference particles that motivated a return to this topic: namely, occurrences of the **different** particle nɔ in clause-initial position. To be more precise, we are concerned with nɔ occurring at the beginning of conversational turns. This in itself would not be especially remarkable; clause initial switch-reference particles have been reported for a number of languages. What is interesting is that gɔ, the particle indicating coreference, never occurs in turn-initial position, even if the speakers are referring to the same individual.[1] This skewed distribution, not uncommon in traditional tales, must be explained by some other mechanism than we have so far been considering.

An excerpt from 'Sendey and Coyote' (5) illustrates this unusual construction. We should note that in Kiowa, there is virtually no indirect reporting of speech; verbal exchanges are reported verbatim, most often, but not always, preceded or followed by a quotative verb. This particular stretch of the story begins with Sendey trying to get Coyote to run a race in order to decide who will get to eat all the roasted prairie dog bones. Sendey offers to handicap himself, saying, "Well, I'll tie a stone on my ankle." In these lines, alternating between Sendey and Coyote, nɔ̨ initiates each turn (a-d). In the third and fourth lines (c-d), the speakers are referring to the same individuals, themselves, but the last turn (d) still begins with nɔ̨.

(15) a. ... nɔ̨ sə́ndé Ø-tǫ́:-nê:

(**diff** Sendey 3sgA-say-hsy)

and Sendey said,

b. nɔ̨ c'ó: ɔnkɔ̂y gyat-hát-phąy-tɔ:

(**diff** stone ankle/at 1sgA:plO-somehow-tie-fut)

"well, I'll tie a stone on my ankle,"

c. nɔ̨ há:oy bát-ay Ø-tǫ́:-nê: mɔ:thǫcǫ́:hį:

(**diff** how.far **1pl/inclA:**plO-start.off/PERF 3sgA-say-hsy Coyote)

"well, how far do we go?" said Coyote

d. nɔ̨ ę́:-hɔ: hegɔ́ bát-ay

(**diff** here-def just.now **1pl/inclA:**plO-start.off/IMP)

"well, we'll start right here now"

Initially, it seemed possible that the boundaries of the quoted material might have been misrecorded, in other words, that nɔ̨ might lie outside the quotes and reflect the fact that different people were speaking. This interpretation would fit nicely with the fairly mechanical operation of switch-reference in many languages. Since quoted material in Kiowa is almost always accompanied by a finite verb of speaking complete with agreement prefixes, the nɔ̨ would simply match "Sendey says" against "Coyote says" with each change of turn in the conversation. However, the nɔ̨'s are indeed within the quoted speech.

As often happens once consciousness has been raised, all kinds of examples of reported speech with turn-initial nɔ̨ jumped out of my field notes. Before proceeding, I should make it clear that my data do not include any actual recorded conversations, by which I mean tape-recordings of Kiowa speakers carrying on a more or less spontaneous conversation. The examples we will look at are all reported or reconstructed or imagined conversational exchanges. As they match the reported speech in traditional tales, I do not have any serious doubts

about their reliability. In addition, most of the examples were reported for their content, as a joke or an illustration of the proper way to welcome visitors for example, rather than as the focus of grammatical discussion. Nevertheless, this limitation in the data remains.

In the first set of examples (6-7), the presence of nɔ turn-initially reflects the speaker's assessment of either the immediately preceding utterance or some prior situation. Example (6) is a typical exchange between travelers who have just arrived and their Kiowa host. By beginning his response with nɔ the host implies that the invitation to have coffee is prompted by the knowledge that the travelers had not yet eaten. The absence of nɔ, on the other hand, implies simple hospitality on the part of a host, not any prior knowledge about the travelers' recent meals.

(6) --(hǫ́:né, pɨ́:-hɛ́: e-dɔ́:) ('No, we haven't eaten.')

--nɔ ma-hé:be nɔ cóy bá-thǫ:

(**diff** 2duA-enter/IMP diff coffee 1pl/inclA:sg0-drink/IMP)

--Well (then), come in and let's have coffee.

It is important to note that nɔ is not restricted to replies in conversational exchanges. Comments "out of the blue", that is, those **not** preceded by discourse on the same topic, can also begin with nɔ. In (7), the distinction between presence and absence of nɔ, involves the speaker's certainty about the addressee's plans to leave. In (7a) the speaker is saying essentially that he was under the impression the person was to leave, but that in the face of contradictory evidence (for example, the person reappearing at the door), the original impression appears to be mistaken. In (7b) the speaker would be quite certain that the addressee was to leave, even though the addressee might still be present. In the absence of nɔ there is no implication of a reassessment of the speaker's knowledge.

(7) **a.** nɔ em-bán-ma gɔ hétɔ́ hɔ́n em-bá:-mɔ̂:

(**diff** 2sgA-go-IMPF same still neg 2sgA-go-NEG)

'I thought you were going to go but you still haven't gone.'

b. em-bán-ma gɔ hétɔ́ hɔ́n em-bá:-mɔ̂:

(2sgA-go-IMPF same still neg 2sgA-go-NEG)

'You were going to go but you still haven't gone.'

Interestingly, turn-initial nɔ can also serve an evaluative or affective function. The first example of this type (8) is from a first-person narrative. The speaker, faced with the dilemma of sharing his storm cellar with a black

widow spider as a tornado approaches, turns back to the house. There, his wife, who has gone about her business not in the least concerned about the tornado, greets him with "So/Well, why are you coming back?" Nɔ suggests something like "after all that fuss you made about the tornado, what are you doing back in here?" She is both mildly amused and faintly critical of his fearfulness and apparent indecision.

(8) ó: tô-y ét-gún nɔ Nettie Ø-tɔ́ nɔ hôndó ma-ôy-ą:

(there house-at 1pl/reflA-jump/PERF diff Nettie 3sgA-say **diff** why/Q 2duA-back-come/PERF)

We went into the house and Nettie said, "Well/So, why did you come back?"

Example (9) is in a similarly humorous vein. The husband has been trying to round up his horses but finds that one is missing. He searches everywhere, doesn't find it, and returns home in disgust, complaining bitterly to his wife about how tired, and dirty, and stuck full of briars he is. His wife responds, "Well, which horse were you looking for?", with nɔ at the beginning of the question. Upon hearing her husband's description of the horse, she ridicules him for being astride the very one he is looking for. Without turn-initial nɔ, her question would not imply any suspicion that the horse he is riding and the horse he is looking for are the same. Nɔ in this case clearly foreshadows the punchline and contributes to its full comic effect.

(9) ... a-mɔnc'óa:-se:be-dɔ:

(1sgA-briar-stick-be)

"...I'm all briar-pricked!"

nɔ há:co-te cę̂: a-dón-gôm

(**diff** how-nom horse 2sgA:sgO-seek-distrib)

"Well, what kind of horse were you looking around for?"

If we summarize what is common to these representative cases of initial nɔ, the speaker is referring back either to the addressee's previous utterance or to some aspect of the situation. The use of nɔ, moreover, seems to indicate not only that the utterance is connected in some way to previous speech or to the non-linguistic context, but that the speaker wishes to make his awareness of that connection known.

It is hard enough to make sense out of discourse elements in one's own language, let alone say anything intelligent about a language studied in a field context. Nevertheless, what is striking about most of the examples we have looked at is that the translation given for utterances with nɔ very often begins with **well**, sometimes **so**. Since bilinguals are presumably sensitive to

pragmatic and discourse features of both of the languages they speak, a look at English **well** might yield some insights into the Kiowa constructions with nɔ.

Well has received considerable attention in the literature, too much to summarize here. What I would like to do is to call attention to two themes pertinent to the Kiowa examples that recur in current studies of discourse particles. The first is simply that of conversational coherence. Deborah Shiffrin (1985:662) argues that the use of **well** "anchors the speaker in a conversation precisely at those points where upcoming coherence is not guaranteed." **Well**, she claims, shows that the speaker recognizes the need to accomplish coherence even if temporarily unable to meet the demands of coherence established by the preceding discourse.

Second, Lawrence Schouruf (1982) suggests that **well** is one of a set of **evincives**, linguistic items that announce that the speaker is currently engaged in thinking or is consulting his own thoughts. Schouruf's arguments are very persuasive, in particular his claim that the variety of interpretations found in studies of **well** in discourse arise from the ways in which we infer reasons for the display of internal consultation.

To make this a little more concrete, consider the following variation on one of Schouruf's examples. In the middle of a conversation, one speaker says, "Well, I guess I'd better be going." Schouruf argues that **well**, in both signaling a change in topic and in announcing that the speaker is consulting his own thoughts or mental activity, implies that the change of topic is a considered one, one with good reasons but which the speaker has chosen not to present in detail. As Schouruf (1982:54) puts it, "by drawing attention to the considered nature of the topic shift, the speaker indirectly provides that the shift is a motivated one and thereby forestalls any possible accusations of non-cooperativeness, peremptoriness, or lack of attention to developing a sequence of shared talk."

These complementary approaches are quite consistent with our discoveries about the function of asymmetrical nɔ in Kiowa. First, the use of nɔ makes explicit the connectedness of the utterance it introduces to the preceding utterance or to some feature of the non-linguistic context. Second, the display of internal consultation forces the listener to infer the reason for such a display. The interpretations that result may be humorous, critical, or admiring, depending upon the circumstances.

To conclude: switch-reference, a grammatical device most often discussed in purely syntactic terms, appears to function pragmatically as well in a number of languages. This should come as no surprise, of course. As we look at syntactic patterns through functionally-tinted glasses, we often find multilayered structure. Although we would certainly not expect Kiowa nɔ to match English **well** in every respect, very similar explanations at the discourse level appear to account for these quite different structural units. The multiplicity of functions of this kind of element contributes both to its varied interpretations and to the difficulty of analyzing it in a satisfying way.

NOTES

[1]The distribution of gɔ is also skewed. Different participants engaged in the same event for the same purpose or bearing the same relationship are conjoined by gɔ: Justin ɛ́-kóm-k'ɔ: gɔ John-al (Justin (2,3sgA):sgO:1sgP-friend-be.lying same John-too) 'Justin is my friend and John is too.'

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